

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 12, 2010

CONTACT: MARA LEE

(202) 225-7163

Reps. Matsui, Ehlers Introduce Legislation to Protect American Families from the High Use of Formaldehyde in Household Furniture

Bi-partisan Bill Follows California's Lead and Provides National Standards for Use of Toxins

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) announced the introduction of H.R. 4805, the Formaldehyde Standards for Composite Wood Act, in partnership with Congressman Vernon Ehlers (R-MI). The bipartisan bill will adopt national standards under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) for formaldehyde in composite wood products. The legislation would also protect the health of American families from the high use of this toxin in common, household items, including hundreds of everyday applications, ranging from paneling and flooring, to cabinets, doors, shelving, molding, and countertops.

The use of formaldehyde impacts public health, and can cause difficulty in breathing in some humans exposed at elevated levels, defined as above 0.1 parts per million. The wood products industry along with environmental, health, and labor organizations worked for more than seven years with the State of California's Air Resources Board (CARB) to establish lower standards for formaldehyde in composite wood products. The phase-in of these new standards is estimated to cut formaldehyde emissions for composite wood products in half to an average of 0.09 parts per million by 2012. Composite wood products are defined as particleboard, medium density fiberboard and hardwood plywood; products made from pieces, chips, particles, fibers or veneers bonded together with a resin.

"Providing a national standard for the use of formaldehyde – a dangerous toxin – in everyday, household items will have a tremendous impact on public health and help protect American families," said Rep. Matsui. "Moreover, it will provide our nation's companies standardized guidelines so that they can confidently build high-quality products that are safe for consumers. I am pleased to use California as model for our country and appreciate the partnership of Rep. Ehlers in this effort. I also commend the numerous members of the wood products industry and of environmental, health, and labor organizations who are helping us to apply our policy nationwide."

"Formaldehyde is often a serious threat to public health," said Rep. Ehlers. "Since formaldehyde gas is invisible and difficult to detect, its effects often are not known until it is too late. This bill will benefit consumers by ensuring higher-quality and safer wood products, and it will benefit the industry by setting a standard to which all competitors are held."

“This is a very important step that will ensure people will not be poisoned by these toxic chemicals,” said Leslie Fields, National Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships Director for the Sierra Club. “We are appreciative of Reps. Matsui and Ehlers’ efforts – and the efforts of the industry – to make sure these products are regulated properly.”

“The legislation introduced by Reps. Matsui and Ehlers will help formalize industry standards that we have been working toward for years,” said Brad Miller, Director of Governor Affairs, Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturing Association (BIFMA.) “This is a welcome step that will provide clarity for the industry and support American businesses who are working hard to make high-quality, safe products for American homes and offices.”

“We are in strong support of the legislation and feel that it is important to get it passed,” added Bill Perdue, Vice-President of Environmental Safety and Health, American Home Furnishings Alliance (AHFA).

Specifically, the Matsui-Ehlers legislation would:

- Establish standards for new composite wood products and products which include:
 - o Hardwood plywood;
 - o Particleboard; and
 - o Medium-density fiberboard.
- Require third-party certification of standards for products that include formaldehyde.
- Exempt:
 - o Secondhand products and antiques;
 - o Other wood products that do not emit formaldehyde.
- Direct the EPA to work with Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection and other relevant federal departments and agencies to promulgate importation enforcement rules.
- Direct the Environmental Protection Agency to promulgate regulations and report to Congress the results of these new standards.

The Formaldehyde Standards for Composite Wood Act was developed with input and the support of the following industries and environmental advocates:

- The American Forest and Paper Association;
- The Engineered Wood Association;
- The Composite Panel Association;
- Hardwood Plywood Veneer Association;
- American Home Furnishings Association;
- Business & Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association;
- Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association;
- The Sierra Club;
- The United Steelworkers; and
- The American Public Health Association.

#